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Editorial

THE CHURCH IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The phrase "to learn by doing" has become a commonplace in education. It is recognized that didactic instruction does not secure desirable educational results unless it is accompanied by leadership in activity. There is a possibility of grave error, however, in failing to recognize that the kind of thing we do must have a very definite relation to the kind of thing we are to learn. We do not learn A by doing B. So we do not learn religion by doing "church work." We only learn religion by engaging in religious activity, which may or may not be the same as "church work."

Religious activity perhaps takes three forms, according to the conception of religion, viz.: the ritualistic, the pietistic, the social. When religion is conceived of as a relationship between God and man, which is conditioned upon the performance of proper acts of worship on man's part, its prevailing activity is, of course, the due observance of carefully regulated ritual requirements. Here belong observance of days and hours, set forms of prayer and praise, sacramental acts, prescribed postures. When religion is thought of as an immediate relationship between God and man, Father and child, Redeemer and redeemed, its activity is likely to be that of spontaneous emotional expression. This may be ejaculatory and extempore prayer, outbursts of song, spontaneous confessions of loyalty, and testimonies of emotional experience. When religion is felt to be an essentially social matter, an attitude of a man toward his fellows, a realization of duty in human relations, the activities

of religion will be those of philanthropy, efforts for social justice, endeavors for the removal of social wrong.

Of course these conceptions of religion are not mutually exclusive. Probably the greatest religious experience would include them all. Considered, however, separately and apart (and this is quite permissible because they often exist separately in different individuals), each conception has its strength and its weakness. Ritualistic religion fosters reverence but easily degenerates into formalism. Pietistic religion produces the glowing enthusiasm that has characterized the mightiest religious movements, but there is a tendency to conventionalize the expressions of genuine experiences and to continue these after the spontaneity is gone, and for others to repeat them by sheer imitation; and this is cant. Social religion is the most vital, and by its genuine human interest brings religion into relation with the world and its needs, but no doubt there is the danger of making religion only human, and losing the sense of spiritual sustenance and power which comes from dependence on the Unseen.

Where any one of these three phases of religion exists alone its weakness is likely to be far more prominent than its strength. How many churches are going through lifeless forms of ecclesiastical observance! How many are trying to whip up an enthusiasm which has long spent its force! And even how many are busy about many things of human interest and have forgotten God! It is most significant and encouraging, however, that where these three phases of religion coexist, they tend to foster the strength of one another and to eliminate the weakness. Noble forms of religious expression carry forward a genuine religious experience between the high points of enthusiasm, and give to all social endeavors a great background of reverent recognition of God. The emotional religious life vitalizes liturgical forms, adding a genuine spontaneity, and gives an enthusiasm of faith and hope to social endeavor. And the religion of human service compels ritualism and pietism to be real by revealing inevitably the hollowness and uselessness of the unreal.

The problem of religious education in the church is the establishment of activities that shall produce this godly, enthusiastic,

humanity-serving religion. If we learn by doing we must do the things of this widely conceived religion in order to attain the religion. The members of the church must have exercise in worship, in piety, and in service. A serious question before the non-liturgical churches is the development of ritual forms of worship that shall cultivate reverence. And this is even more important for the young people than for adults. All recent studies in genetic psychology reveal the love of childhood and youth for ritual. Yet this is a subject to which the Sunday school, which is all of the church that many of the children and youth know much about, has given very little attention. The least ritualistic churches have a certain decorum about their public worship, but the Sunday school is a mass-meeting. The kindergarten and primary departments are often the best regulated in this respect. The children are learning forms and postures of prayer, the recitation in decorous fashion of great and simple classic expressions of religion, and sometimes, though unhappily not too commonly, noble hymns of praise. Whether the junior church will give us the desired development of a simple liturgical religion it is perhaps too early to say. But serious endeavors are necessary to bring up our children and youth in that right attitude expressed in the fine phrase (which of course we shall not give to them), "the fear of the Lord."

No less important is a careful study of the best opportunities of spontaneous expression of religious experience. A few years ago it seemed to be generally agreed that the most important thing that young people could do was "to take some part *other than singing*" in a religious meeting. And then it was very logically concluded that what was good at twenty years of age must be better still at fifteen and best of all at ten, so we had the most earnest efforts to secure spontaneous prayers and little speeches from children. All this was modeled on the church prayer-meeting, which in many places was already moribund. Perhaps we are in a reaction against this undue emphasis and in danger of giving up spontaneous religious expression altogether. It ought to be given up wherever it involves a self-consciousness, as is generally the case with children and with boys and girls. But young and older men and women ought to talk about religion and about its experi-

ence and its problems; and they ought to pray together and for one another. We learn by doing, and a vitality of prayer will come from the practice of prayer, and a reality of faith will come from mutual encouragement to faith. Is it not desirable so to organize our young people's meetings and church prayer-meetings that there may be opportunities but not necessities of spontaneous religious expression? We have blundered along, conventionalizing activities which were at first spontaneous and significant. We need careful study of the problem of adaptation to age, sex, religious development, of the practices of pietistic religion.

Both of the foregoing problems are easy in comparison with the third. The church is equipped to be a gymnasium of ritualistic and pietistic exercises. It may need to modernize and adapt to new conditions its methods and practices, but it has all the machinery and it may easily have the experts for the task. But to learn social service by doing is not so easy. A lesson on prayer may be followed at once by the exercise of prayer. But how shall we exercise ourselves in forgiveness, patience, justice, kindness? If religion were all to be done in church our task would be so much easier. But it is to be done in the busy world. Shall church and Sunday school merely exhort, or, to get a step farther educationally, help the people and the youth to deduce right principles of conduct, and then send them out to do the right? This does not bring the doing and learning near enough in the educational process. The doing is apart from the observation of the teacher, and cannot be controlled, criticized, rectified. The singing teacher bids us go away and practice, and then come back and sing before him for his criticism. But we never bring our moral results back for review. The church must find ways of promoting social activities under supervision. Some advanced Sunday schools are working out graded programs of social endeavor. These will show an orderly and natural advance from the simple philanthropies and kindness to animals of the young children to the wide missionary activities and community improvements of the adults. It is of the highest importance to bear in mind the distinction between the educational value of a given social activity and its immediate economic value in the advancement of some good cause. We have been so much

concerned with doing good, and especially with raising money, that we have set our attention upon these as ends to the neglect of the educational significance to the doers and donors. So far as the children and youth are concerned, at all events, we should promote no activity and solicit no money except with the main purpose of developing the social interest of the youth. We shall have to make careful study of the actual reactions of young people to these social activities. We must find out what they are learning by the doing. No doubt some of them are learning to endeavor to dodge collections or to avoid committees, a sure sign of the failure of our whole undertaking. A few churches have already employed a director of social service, whose duty is to guide the activities of the membership in human helpfulness. There are large possibilities for expert leadership in this field. Certain it is that we cannot rely upon any literary material or any exhortation to develop the passion for humanity unless with these we provide natural opportunities of social expression.

We have made great advance in the improvement of our curricula of religious education and are fairly clear regarding the course of further improvement. We are only in the beginning of a scientific study of expressional activity in religious education.